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ABSTRACT

On the basis of research among the Portuguese in a Massachusetts district, the author finds that two features of the culture of the school in the United States contrast sharply with the corresponding features in Portugal: the degree of "social freedom" and "pedagogical freedom" allowed students. The behavioral parameters of these differences are detailed. American teachers deal with students in ways unfamiliar and even demeaning to immigrant Portuguese students because of the American emphasis upon operational thinking and because Americans tend to overprotect children. The educational consequences of these deep cultural patterns are delineated. Special adjustment problems of three categories of immigrant Portuguese secondary students are then outlined. Although the problems in all three cases are similar, the greatest difficulty will be experienced by those who had legally discontinued their education in Portugal and then had been gainfully employed prior to immigrating and re-entering school in the U.S. But those who were attending the non-compulsory liceus in Portugal prior to immigrating also will find unfamiliar numerous features of high school culture and will be disappointed by the absence of any academic challenge. However, the kind and helpful attention given to all students by American teachers is an ameliorative factor. (Author)

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The Cross-Cultural Problems of Immigrant Portuguese Students in American Schools

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Introduction

The research on which this article is based was carried out in the spring of 1976 in a school district in Massachusetts that was then receiving substantial numbers of immigrant Portuguese students from the Azores. By law, all non-English-dominant students in Massachusetts must receive three years of transitional bilingual education (TBE), and my research was conducted in TBE classrooms, especially at the secondary level. Nevertheless, I believe that my findings--at least insofar as they are reported here--apply in considerable measure to virtually any public school classroom in the United States wherein immigrant Portuguese students are studying.

If my research design has a weakness, it lies in the fact that a parallel study was not carried out in classrooms in the Azores, or elsewhere in Portugal. While I am satis-

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fied that my in-depth interviews of numerous former students and teachers as well as observers of the Portuguese system gave me a broadly accurate picture of the culture of the school in that country, the fact remains that there is no substitute for direct observation. In addition, the fluid social and political situation in Portugal since the revolution may have had an effect of one kind or another on daily life and work in Portuguese schools and classrooms.

Readers who are dealing with immigrant Portuguese students in American schools, and especially those who have firsthand knowledge of post-revolution Portuguese schools, are invited to communicate directly to me their reactions and suggestions regarding the generalizations that follow.

General Cross-Cultural Problems

In relation to the culture of the school in the United States, two features of the culture of the school in Portugal are strikingly different. These concern the social freedom and the pedagogical freedom allowed to the students. In using the term "social freedom" I refer to the rights and privileges assumed to belong to students with regard to their movements and actions on the school property (principally,

but not exclusively, outside of classrooms), and with regard to their entrance upon and exit from school property. By "pedagogical freedom" I refer to the rights and privileges assumed to belong to students with regard to their participation in learning activities in the classroom. In Portugal the students have virtually unlimited social freedom but extremely limited pedagogical freedom. In the United States the students have very little social freedom but a considerable amount of pedagogical freedom. This discrepancy is illustrated in Figure 1. Of course, a generalization such as this shares the weakness of all generalizations in the social sciences. In both Portugal and the United States, some teachers are stricter in the classroom while others are more lenient, and so forth. In spite of such individual differences, however, I believe that this generalization may be taken as the basic working principle in the understanding of the cross-cultural problems of immigrant Portuguese students in American schools.

	PORTUGAL	U.S.A.
social freedom	high	low
pedagogical freedom	low	high

Figure 1: The basic difference between the two school cultures.

What are the behavioral parameters of this cross-cultural difference? First, the student goes to school in his or her native land, Portugal. Outside of the classroom door, he is assumed to be quite capable of looking after himself. While he is in escola primária, it is quite unusual for him to be overtly monitored or regimented by his teachers; when he goes to the liceu, it is unheard of. Not only is he allowed to move about at will throughout most areas of the school and campus, but he even is free to leave the school grounds if he wishes and for any reason. His movements are of no concern to the school authorities because a feature of the culture of the school in Portugal is that school personnel do not feel responsible for the welfare and safety of the students.[1] Responsibility for the students' welfare and safety belongs to the students themselves, and it appears that they discharge this responsibility admirably well.

But when the student crosses the threshold of the Portuguese classroom, his freedom ends. Pedagogically speaking, the student is assumed by his teacher to be ignorant, not in terms of native intelligence, but in terms of acquired knowledge. As unknowledgeable, the student cannot possibly have anything of value to contribute to the lesson, be it positive input (contributions, opinions) or clarifying questions. He is expected to sit quietly, to listen respect-

fully, to copy down, and thus to learn under the wise and informed academic guidance of the professor. The student in Portugal is expected to show no initiative in the classroom. He is not even allowed any choice whatsoever with regard to courses until the sexto ano, which only a tiny fraction of Portuguese students attend.

Now the student comes to his adopted country, the United States. Outside of the door of the American classroom, this same student (no matter what his age) is assumed to be so irresponsible and prone to mischief that he requires almost constant adult supervision in order to insure the safety of himself, his peers, and school property. He is regimented and regulated in numerous ways, and his movements are a subject of continual concern to school authorities. The notion that a student should be free to leave the campus--or even the building itself--at will is entertained in very few American schools. For here, school is in large measure a custodial institution. It must keep the student in custody during the specified hours by keeping him under surveillance both in class and when he has no class to attend. He is constantly monitored in the cafeteria, in the halls, and on the playground. Needless to point out, the immigrant Portuguese student finds such treatment humiliating.

When the immigrant student enters the American classroom, the first difference he finds is that the teacher has

preceded him there. This never would have been the case in Portugal; the reason it is true in the United States is directly related to the discussion in the preceding paragraph. Pedagogically speaking, however, the immigrant Portuguese student finds another marked change. His individual contributions to the lesson not only are valued, but also may be solicited. It is considered seemly for him to ask questions, express opinions, offer information, and discuss issues, and within certain limits he may even display emotion and openly disagree with the teacher. Such ways of doing things are exceedingly rare in Portugal, but most Portuguese students in America find little difficulty in adjusting to this new state of affairs. For if they reflected upon their situation before leaving Portugal, they probably felt critical of a classroom atmosphere characterized in terms of rei e escravos (king and slaves). The culture of the American classroom is found to be highly preferable.

To recapitulate briefly: In Portugal, the student is considered responsible and autonomous and accordingly is allowed virtually unlimited social freedom during his or her out-of-class hours. But in class, the student is considered unknowledgeable (but not necessarily unintelligent) and therefore is denied pedagogical freedom. In the United States, the student is assumed to be irresponsible and incapable of self-discipline and so is denied social freedom. In class,

the student is encouraged, and may be positively expected, to make contributions of several varieties to the lesson; in other words, he has considerable pedagogical freedom. The school age individual moving from Portugal to the United States must learn to make the transition from high to low social freedom, and from low to high pedagogical freedom. And for most, the transition is quite abrupt.

Let us return now to my point that students in Portugal are considered unknowledgeable by their teachers. I have suggested--and now I want to argue more positively--that in spite of being considered unknowledgeable, the Portuguese student is not assumed to be unintelligent. As evidence that Portuguese teachers seem to consider their students intelligent, I note the following:

(a) Portuguese schools move at a distinctly rapid pace in introducing new topics (for example, multiplication and division are taught in primeira classe, syllabication is taught in segunda classe, and so forth).

(b) Exams in Portugal are based almost exclusively on the ability to recall, not the ability to merely recognize.

(c) Exams in Portugal cover as many as three years of study in as many as fourteen different subjects.

(d) There is very little solicitous intervention of Portuguese teachers in assisting the students to learn, particularly at the liceu level.

(e) Portuguese students are expected to make a great deal of headway in their lessons through individual study of textbooks at home.

(f) Corporal punishment is administered not for disciplinary infractions, but for unwillingness or inability to keep up with the expected pace of learning.

Now could we say, comparatively speaking, that American teachers assume their students to be knowledgeable but unintelligent? As evidence that they consider them knowledgeable we might point to the pedagogical freedom commonly found in American schools. And as evidence that American students are considered unintelligent we might note that in our schools we move at a relative snail's pace in introducing new substantive material, that we forever exhort classroom teachers to do the impossible by devoting individual attention to the special needs of each and every student, and that we base our tests and exams more upon recognition than upon recall. My research found that immigrant Portuguese students, virtually without exception, consider school in this country comparatively very easy.[2]

It is too simplistic, I believe, to conclude that American teachers consider their students to be knowledgeable but unintelligent. My hunch is that the evidence in the previous paragraph points not toward such a conclusion, but rather toward the workings of two features of American deep

culture.[3] These are the American emphasis upon operational thinking, and the American tendency to adore and (over)protect children. I will discuss each of these briefly, contrasting the American and Portuguese approaches.

Operational thinking refers to the organization of perception and cognitive processes into a form that enables the individual to act. It stresses results and consequences, not the acquisition of knowledge for its own sake. It values the pragmatic, avoiding the theoretical and regarding ideology with suspicion. Operational thinking is based upon inductive reasoning; inductive reasoning begins with facts and goes on to make inferences, to test hypotheses, and in general to be open to the possibility that experience may alter one's conclusions. Operational thinking is the American way of approaching cognitive material, and the pedagogical characteristics of American schools are quite well-suited to promote operational thinking: Classroom procedures tend to emphasize learning by doing, verbal trading of ideas and experiences, and questioning--not only of students by the teacher, but also of the teacher by the students. All this takes time and inevitably slows down the pace of learning. It also eliminates the possibility of having only one point of view--the teacher's--expressed. As for tests and exams, those of the objective variety are based on recognition more so than on recall; consequently, a premium is not put on the

ability to memorize and regurgitate, which is scarcely a mode of learning that stresses practical consequences and openness to experience. Even more promotive of operational thinking are essay or "subjective" exams, especially those asking the student to compare and contrast, to adopt a point of view and defend it, or to relate one set of facts to another. Incidently, this type of exam usually will cause the immigrant Portuguese student to feel very much at a loss as how to proceed. For only rarely will an immigrant student appear who has encountered such exams in Portuguese schools.

Operational thinking appears not to be valued in Portugal nearly to the degree that it is here. Portuguese classroom procedures are much better geared for dispensing knowledge for knowledge's sake, for emphasizing facts and the theoretical, and for approaching cognitive material on the basis of deductive reasoning. Deductive reasoning emphasizes the manipulation of given facts through the use of logical processes, playing down the lessons of experience and showing little interest in practical consequences. Such an approach to learning easily dispenses with points of view other than those of the teacher and the textbook, so that the class can move ahead much faster from topic to topic. In addition, Portuguese examinations are typically based upon recall, and rote memorization therefore is the most efficient

way in which the student may acquire the material upon which he is to be tested.

An important consequence of this difference between American and Portuguese classrooms is that the immigrant Portuguese student will experience American classroom procedure as lacking rigor, intensity, and perhaps even serious purpose. He or she will find academic work in this country to be much easier and less challenging. Examinations, too, will be regarded as unchallenging because the immigrant student will find that he can do well without employing the onerous process of memorization (although, as noted previously, subjective examinations will be found perplexing and difficult).

Turning now to the matter of the American tendency to adore and (over)protect children, we should note that in spite of the explicit value placed upon initiative and self-reliance in our culture, Americans erect numerous barriers intended to bar children from the adult world for as long as possible. The institution of the babysitter serves this function admirably. Children are protected from bad news, the facts of sex, and quarreling parents. They are prohibited by law from working until an advanced age, relative to other cultures including that of the Portuguese. American parents, especially those belonging or aspiring to the

dominant middle class, feel that they must listen to their children, solicit their opinions and feelings, and run a more or less democratic home. They support a host of child specialists to help them answer that key question, "What should we do for our children?" Now I do not believe that Portuguese parents are entirely different from American parents. What I do believe is that the Portuguese not only erect significantly fewer obstacles barring children from the adult world, but also implicitly assume their children to be mature and responsible individuals at a comparatively early age. No doubt economic factors are involved here. For whereas the dominant middle class in America expects, and can afford, to sacrifice for its children for a long time (especially between ages eighteen and twenty-one while the child is at college), the dominant lower class in Portugal is compelled by its poverty to view its children as an economic asset beginning at about age fourteen.

Not surprisingly, the child rearing patterns that find expression in the home also find expression in the school--to arrange matters differently would be to risk a disjuncted culture. And since American parents are comparatively indulgent with their children, wanting them to be happy, expressive, and self-actualized, American teachers take a similar approach in the classroom. The ideal is for American children to enjoy their childhood, no less in the

school than in the home. Consequently, the American public school is not a place where particularly severe demands are made on children. Academic work proceeds at a comparatively leisurely pace, homework is seldom assigned in large quantities, and tests are rarely terribly difficult. A significant amount of school time is given over to artistic and creative efforts. The teachers are encouraged, if not expected, to provide for each individual child a tailor-made set of learning experiences, and to administer these with as much solicitous attention as possible so that the child will undergo affective as well as cognitive growth. And the learning process customarily includes not a few features which in other cultures would be associated almost exclusively with recreational pursuits.[4]

In Portugal, school is not conducted in this fashion. It is not fair or accurate to say that school in Portugal is "serious business," implying that school in the United States is not. We educators in America are serious too, but we are serious about different things and in different ways. In Portugal, the object seems to be to move ahead academically as rapidly as possible, and to expedite matters by keeping virtually all non-academic pursuits out of the school altogether. Consequently, school in Portugal is experienced by the students as an unrelenting grind. Those who gain instant cross-cultural perspective by attending school in America

look back with a sense of awe at how hard the academic work was in the escola primária, and especially in the liceu. Conversely, academic work in American schools is perceived as distinctly undemanding. In this respect, the adjustment facing the immigrant student is not difficult.

On the other hand, it may seem to the immigrant student fresh from Portuguese schools that his American teachers relate to him as though he were somewhat lacking in academic ability (as he has learned to define "academic ability"). His perception is better explained, however, by reference to the American teachers' tendency to view him as less mature and more in need of helpful attention than was the case in Portugal. My hunch is that this comparatively paternalistic attitude is resented by some of the students, but that this resentment does not become a serious problem because the teachers' attitude is demonstrated in ways that the student usually finds agreeable. In my interviews with immigrant Portuguese students, I found that they universally experience American teachers as warmer, kinder, more friendly and accepting--in a word, more humane--than most or all of the teachers they had in Portugal.

Special Problems of Certain Types of Students

The immigrant Portuguese students who enter secondary institutions following their arrival in the United States

fall into one of three broad categories with few exceptions:[5]

(a) Some students had been enrolled in one of the six pre-liceu years in Portugal, and undergo no discontinuity in their educational career longer than a few weeks or a summer.

(b) Some students had completed four to six years of school in Portugal, and then had stopped attending school for a significant period of time (up to several years); they resume school attendance in the United States because of the compulsory attendance laws.

(c) Some students had been attending a liceu or comparable secondary institution in Portugal, and undergo no discontinuity in their educational career longer than a few weeks or a summer.

Students in the first of the three categories, in my judgment, can be expected to experience the fewest adjustment problems in American secondary schools. I say this for two reasons. The first is that students in this category are somewhat younger and have spent less time in the schools of Portugal. Being younger, they should be more flexible and adaptable; furthermore, they should have become less habituated to the ways of life and work that are common in the schools of Portugal. The second reason requires more research in order to be substantiated, but I believe it to be an important factor: The differences between Portuguese and American schools grow more pronounced as one

advances up the educational ladder. The differences are those which I discussed in the previous section of this article.[6]

Students in the second category--those who have spent a substantial amount of time out of school--may have special problems stemming from their out-of-school experiences. Portuguese girls who graduate from escola primária and who do not continue their education traditionally remain em casa (at home) under the supervision and tutelage of their mothers until the day of their marriage. During these years of waiting, girls are supposed to learn some of the secrets of dealing with men, perfect their skills in caring for a family, and prepare their trousseaux. Some girls also learn a trade during these years. Furthermore, the romantic involvement of girls with young men is fairly closely supervised. My point is that the Portuguese girl who remains em casa during her teenage years is in somewhat of a subordinated position, one which in some sense requires her to be the recipient of teaching and supervision by adults.

For boys who do not continue school beyond escola primária, the case is somewhat different. The usual pattern is for these young men--"boys" carries a false implication--to take a paying job and contribute to the family's income, or at least to contribute labor to the family's farm or business. The work they do in most cases is not only a man's

work (though they may not receive a man's wages until they are about age eighteen), but it is usually done in the company of adult men. I myself have seen many young teenagers working with adult men on road gangs both on the Continent and in the Azores.

When Portuguese teenagers who have left school come to the States, they face a particularly difficult adjustment problem, and I believe that this problem may be a little worse for the males than for the females. The mere fact of being forced to return to school is not the worst feature of their problem; what makes it really painful, especially for the males, is that after being considered and <u>treated</u> as adult or near adult, they are abruptly cast into a milieu where it is taken for granted that they are children. Given that there are compulsory attendance laws in this country, there is nothing that can be done about this; these young men and women simply must bear up under the ignominy of being reduced at a stroke to the status of immature children after having tasted of the respect accorded to an adult. I cannot see that any combination of courses, any special materials or curriculum, or any American teacher fluent in Portuguese is going to assuage this blow because it is not the educational community <u>per se</u> that is responsible for the exceedingly low level of social freedom in American schools, but American cultural assumptions about and expectations of

people of this age. A teacher who understands the problem, however, may be able to make some adjustments or allowances for students who fall into this category.[7]

Students in the third category--those who enter the American high school directly from the Portuguese liceu--have all the problems I have described so far in this article. To review briefly, they have not only problems adjusting to a new teaching style, but also problems adjusting to a new set of expectations and assumptions about their social and emotional maturity. With regard to the latter, their adjustments will not be substantially different from those of students in the second category. It is true that because they were attending school in Portugal at the time of their emigration, they probably will approach the idea of attending school with more acceptance and more confidence than the former working person. But they are equally unprepared for the status reversal to which they are subjected. In the liceu, their status had been that of an elite (in terms of academic ability if not also of socioeconomic status) by virtue of the fact that a liceu education is compulsory for no one, and like their former schoolmates working on roads or in fields, they were treated like mature or nearly mature adults by all their acquaintances. Given that they virtually always find the academic work in this country to lack any challenge and to require comparatively small effort, and that they react positively to American teachers and to most of their peda-

gogical methods, I believe that the restriction on their social freedom--based as it is on a humiliating assumption--is as serious a cross-cultural problem as must be dealt with by immigrant Portuguese students.

With regard to pedagogical methods, it appears that in only one respect will former liceu students encounter potentially serious difficulties. As I noted previously, tests and examinations of certain kinds will leave immigrant students at a loss as how to proceed. These exams, which fundamentally require students to use their imagination in manipulating facts, are a feature of the American preference for operational thinking. But, as exams upon which grades are based, they are the one feature most likely to cause problems. For students in Portugal, especially at the liceu level, are rarely if ever asked to apply their imaginations to any academic task.

Summary

In immigrating to the United States, school-age Portuguese youth leave an educational milieu wherein they had almost unlimited social freedom but virtually no pedagogical freedom, and enter one wherein the situation in both cases is reversed. My research in Massachusetts has shown that these students tend to find the new restrictions on their social freedom more difficult to adjust to and accept than

their newly found pedagogical freedom. For the pervasive social restrictions will be experienced as demeaning and as robbing them of justly deserved mature status. Since such treatment of young people is an integral feature of American deep culture, there is virtually nothing that can be done to assuage the blow for the immigrant students. The story is quite different in the case of the changes they encounter in classroom procedure. The new pedagogical freedom may prove perplexing for a while, but soon it will be experienced with a sense of relief. True, the student has moved from an educational milieu where deductive reasoning is the norm to one where operational thinking is valued; true, he may feel critical of an academic system which he experiences as lacking rigor and serious purpose. But the kind and helpful attention routinely given to him by American teachers will usually overcome his anxiety and his critical feelings. In fact, nothing will impress him more than the vast difference between the modus operandi of his former and present teachers. The immigrant student will rarely encounter an academic challenge in American classrooms other than those caused by difficulties with the English language or by his lack of experience in responding to examinations requiring the application of imagination in the manipulation of facts. In general, it can be predicted that older immigrant students will face greater difficulty in adjusting to their new educational milieu. Specifically,

it can be expected that the greatest difficulties in adjustment will be experienced by those immigrant students who had left school and were gainfully employed prior to emigrating, and who were then forced to re-enter school upon their arrival in the United States.

--NOTES--

1. I do not mean to imply that Portuguese school authorities are totally devoid of feelings of responsibility for their students under all circumstances. I am talking about their attitudes and assumptions about students during the course of normal school days.

2. One of my informants put it this way: "In my case, at least, except for the learning of the English language I did not meet any challenge whatsoever in the American high school."

3. By "deep culture" I mean the intangible and out-of-awareness differences in the ways people from different regions or backgrounds think, feel, and behave in human interactions. Edward T. Hall is probably the leading writer on the influence of culture upon human behavior at the deepest levels.

4. In speaking of "recreational pursuits" in the classroom, I have in mind the comparatively extensive use in American schools of films and film-strips, simulation games and informal competitions such as "spelling baseball," and other activities which are intended to be enjoyed by the students. My

research has uncovered the fact that Portuguese students tend to react poorly to them, feeling that the mixture of recreational methods with educational pursuits is not only pointless but also humiliating. A bilingual teacher told me that one of her Portuguese students, upon being introduced to yet another of the "fun" features of American education, commented disgustedly, Já não somos crianças! ("We are no longer children!")

5. The few exceptions to the three broad categories are virtually all provided by those students who arrive from Portugal either with no educational background or with a history of repeated failures; such students, being illiterate or nearly so, present huge problems to local personnel in terms of placement (due to their ages) and instructional methods.

6. In terms of the field sensitive/field independent dichotomy, Portuguese schools are more field independent than American schools at all grade levels, and the difference between them increases markedly as one considers higher and higher grades. A liceu student immigrating to the United States must make a transition from an extremely field independent educational milieu to one which is relatively balanced (though tending toward field independence).

7. My research suggests that most of these former working men of age fourteen or fifteen attempt to cope through a species of passive resistance. In other words, they sit more or less patiently and wait until their sixteenth birthday, meanwhile doing the absolute minimum of school work to get by. Some may refuse to study subjects that they see no use for, such as the Portuguese language.

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